

## CLAIMS

We claim:

1                   1. A method for distributing product offers and other information to  
2 consumers over a communication network, comprising the steps of:  
3                    storing the conditions of manufacturer offers, pertaining to multiple  
4 product manufacturers, in a database associated with a cooperative communication  
5 network site;  
6                    storing the conditions of retailer special deals, pertaining to multiple  
7 product retailers, in the database associated with the cooperative communication network  
8 site; and  
9                    providing information from the database, to a consumer in response to a  
10 consumer request made from a consumer communication node connected to the  
11 communication network, but without regard for whether the consumer communication  
12 node is logged in to the cooperative communication site or to a retailer or manufacturer  
13 network site, or another independently administered site.

1                   2. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of providing  
2 information from the database includes:  
3                    receiving a query from a consumer logged in to a network site of a  
4 manufacturer;  
5                    in response to the query from the consumer, providing a geographically  
6 limited list of retailers having special deals pertaining to product offers made by the  
7 manufacturer;  
8                    receiving retailer selection data from the consumer through the  
9 manufacturer network site; and  
10                  transmitting details of the selected offers to the manufacturer network site  
11 for use by the consumer.

1                   3. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of providing  
2 information from the database includes:  
3                    receiving a query from a consumer logged in to a network site of a  
4 manufacturer;  
5                    in response to the query from the consumer, providing a geographically  
6 limited list of retailers having special deals pertaining to product offers made by the  
7 manufacturer;  
8                    receiving retailer selection data from the consumer through the  
9 manufacturer network site; and  
10                  linking the consumer directly to a selected retailer network site to view  
11 available offers.

1                   4. A method for distributing product offers and other information to  
2 consumers over a communication network, comprising the steps of:  
3                    storing the conditions of manufacturer offers, pertaining to multiple  
4 product manufacturers, in a database associated with a cooperative communication  
5 network site; and  
6                    providing information from the database, to a consumer in response to a  
7 consumer request made from a consumer communication node connected to the  
8 communication network, but without regard for whether the consumer communication  
9 node is logged in to the cooperative communication site or to a retailer or manufacturer  
10 network site, or another independently administered site.

1                   5. A method as defined in claim 4, wherein the step of providing  
2 information from the database includes:  
3                    receiving a query from a consumer logged in to a network site of a  
4 retailer;  
5                    in response to the query from the consumer, providing a list of  
6 manufacturer offers available at the retailer;  
7                    receiving offer selection data from the consumer through the retailer

8 network site; and

9 transmitting details of the selected offers to the retailer network site for  
10 use by the consumer.

1 6. A method as defined in claim 5, wherein the step of providing  
2 manufacturer offers includes:

3 retrieving a personal page of consumer preferences previously established  
4 by the consumer; and

5 including in the provided manufacturer offers at least some that are  
6 specific to the consumer who made the query, based on information retrieved in the  
7 consumer's personal page.

1 7. A method as defined in claim 5, wherein the step of providing  
2 manufacturer offers includes:

3 receiving from the consumer an identification code used by the consumer  
4 in making purchases;

5 using the consumer identification code to retrieve information pertaining  
6 to the consumer's prior shopping behavior; and

7 including in the provided manufacturer offers at least some that are  
8 specific to the consumer who made the query, based on the retrieved information  
9 pertaining to the consumer's prior shopping behavior.

1 8. A method as defined in claim 5, wherein the step of providing  
2 manufacturer offers includes:

3 obtaining consumer-identifying data;

4 retrieving information based on the consumer-identifying data; and

5 including in the provided manufacturer offers at least some that are  
6 specific to the consumer who made the query, based on the retrieved information.

1                   9. A method as defined in claim 8, wherein the step of retrieving  
2 information includes retrieving demographic data pertaining to the consumer.

1                   10. A method as defined in claim 8, wherein the step of retrieving  
2 information includes retrieving customer profile data previously provided by the  
3 consumer.

1                   11. A method as defined in claim 8, wherein the step of retrieving  
2 information includes retrieving prior purchasing behavior data recorded on prior store  
3 visits by the consumer.

1                   12. A method as defined in claim 1, and further comprising:  
2 receiving the consumer's a postal code; and  
3 using the consumer's postal code to customize the information provided  
4 to the consumer's local geographical area.

1                   13. A method as defined in claim 4, and further comprising:  
2 receiving the consumer's a postal code; and  
3 using the consumer's postal code to customize the information provided  
4 to the consumer's local geographical area.

1                   14. An interactive communication system for distributing information to  
2 consumers through a communication network having at least one manufacturer  
3 communication network site, administered by a manufacturer of products sold to  
4 consumers through retailers, and at least one retailer communication network site,  
5 administered by a retailer of products purchased from manufacturers and sold to  
6 consumers, the interactive communication system comprising:  
7                   a cooperative communication network site including a database containing  
8 information pertaining to manufacturer offers to consumers and retailer special deals for  
9 consumers;

10 at least one consumer communication node connected to the communication  
11 network and logged in to a communication network site selected from the  
12 manufacturer site, the retailer site and the cooperative site;

13 means at the cooperative communications node, for receiving a consumer  
14 request made through the consumer communication node, even if the consumer node is  
15 not logged in to the cooperative communication site directly;

16 means at the cooperative communication node, for responding to the  
17 consumer request by providing product offer information stored in the database; and

18 means installed at cooperating manufacturer and retailer sites, for  
19 providing communication linkage between the cooperative communication node and a  
20 consumer node logged in to one of the manufacturer or retailer sites, whereby the  
21 consumer node receives the product offer information as if logged in directly to the  
22 cooperative communication node.

1 15. An interactive communication system as defined in claim 14, wherein:  
2 the means for responding to a consumer request includes means, operative  
3 when the request is made through a manufacturer site, for transmitting a list of retailers  
4 having special deals pertaining to product offers made by the manufacturer associated  
5 with the site through which the request was connected.

1 16. An interactive communication system as defined in claim 14, wherein:  
2 the means for responding to a consumer request includes means, operative  
3 when the request is made through a retailer site, for transmitting a list of manufacturer  
4 offers available at the retailer associated with the site through which the request was  
5 connected.

1 17. An interactive communication system as defined in claim 16, wherein:  
2 the means for transmitting a list of manufacturer offers includes a  
3 consumer-specific database for use in selecting offers based on product preferences  
4 expressed by the consumer.

1           18. An interactive communication system as defined in claim 16, wherein:  
2           the means for transmitting a list of manufacturer offers includes a  
3 consumer-specific database for use in selecting offers based on past shopping activity of  
4 the consumer.

1           19. An interactive communication system as defined in claim 16, wherein:  
2           the means for transmitting a list of manufacturer offers includes a  
3 consumer-specific database for use in selecting offers based on demographic data  
4 supplied by the consumer.

1           20. A method for distributing purchase incentives to consumers over a  
2 communication network, comprising the steps of:  
3           storing data pertaining to purchase incentives in a database associated with  
4 a purchase incentive server site coupled to the network;  
5           for at least one purchase incentive, displaying an advertising banner on  
6 at least one independent commercial network site, for viewing by consumers; and  
7           in response to selection of the banner by a consumer logged in to the  
8 independent commercial network site, providing a purchase incentive directly to the  
9 consumer for viewing and recording, whereby the consumer can obtain a selected  
10 product incentive directly while logged in to the commercial site.

1           21. A method as defined in claim 20, and further comprising the steps of:  
2           identifying the independent commercial network site from which selection  
3 of the advertising banner was made by the consumer; and  
4           conditioning the step of providing a product purchase incentive on the  
5 identity of the independent commercial network site, wherein different product purchase  
6 incentives are provided depending on the identity of the independent commercial network  
7 site.

1           22. A method for distributing product purchase incentives to consumers  
2 over a communication network, comprising the steps of:  
3           storing the conditions of manufacturer product purchase incentives,  
4 pertaining to multiple manufacturers' products, in a database associated with a product  
5 incentive server site coupled to the network;  
6           for at least one selected product purchase incentive, displaying a banner  
7 on at least one independent commercial network site, for viewing by consumers; and  
8           in response to selection of the banner by a consumer logged in to the  
9 independent commercial network site, providing a product purchase incentive to the  
10 consumer for viewing and recording, whereby the consumer can obtain product purchase  
11 incentives directly when logged in to the commercial site.

1           23. A method as defined in claim 22, and further comprising the steps of:  
2           conditioning the step of providing a product purchase incentive on receipt  
3 of registration information from the consumer.

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